

McGrorty-Kittson House
603 Jackson Street
St. Paul
Ramsey County
Minnesota

HABS No. MINN-46

HABS
MINN
62-SAIPA
8-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MINN-46

McGRORTY-KITTSON HOUSE

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Address: 603 Jackson Street, St. Paul, Ramsey County,
Minnesota

Present Owner: Not determined

Present Occupant: Various tenants

Present Use: Apartments

Brief Statement
of Significance: A good example of a typical modest stone residence
built in St. Paul during the time of the formula-
tion of the state of Minnesota.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:
1856 - William B. McGrorty purchased the 100-foot
lot and erected the house
c. 1866-1882 - House purchased and occupied by
Norman W. Kittson
1882 to present - Title information not determined
2. Date of erection: 1856
3. Architect, builders, suppliers: Not known
4. Original plans, construction: The original building
was a two-story stone structure, approximately 30 feet
square, with a hipped roof and no rear wings.
5. Alterations and additions: Several additions have been
made to the original structure, apparently all by
Kittson. A two-story rectangular stone wing projects
from the rear of the main block (the ridge of the gable
roof intersects the main block just below the eave
line). A one-story stone shed with a gable roof was
added to the rear of the two-story wing. Later residents
have extensively remodeled the interior, and at present
the house is used as a multi-family dwelling.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with Building:

The only reference discovered for Captain William B. McGrorty
identifies him as a St. Paul grocer and politician. Norman W.

Kittson was a pioneer fur trader, businessman, and territorial legislator. Born in Sorel, Lower Canada, on March 5, 1814, he was the grandson of Alexander Henry, the celebrated explorer and traveler, who journeyed through the Lake Superior, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan districts as early as 1776. Kittson came to the northwest in 1830 as an employee of the American Fur Company; and in 1834, he established his own fur business at Cold Spring, just north of Fort Snelling. In 1851, Kittson came to St. Paul as a Special Partner with the American Fur Company, and shortly thereafter he was elected a member of the Council of the Minnesota Legislature. Re-elected in 1853, he was also elected Mayor of St. Paul in 1858. A successful businessman, he formed the firm of Forbes and Kittson for general Indian trade and supply, and also became quite active in steamboating.

C. Sources of Information:

Koeper, H. F. Historic St. Paul Buildings. A report of Historic Sites Committee, a special citizens' group named by the St. Paul City Planning Board. St. Paul: St. Paul City Planning Board, 1964.

Warner, George E. History of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul. Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1881.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

- A. Condition of Fabric: Poor. The exterior woodwork is deteriorating, and the stone wall on the north elevation of the main block is bulging at the center and has developed a serious crack.
- B. Technical Description of Exterior:
1. Over-all dimensions: Square (30 feet on a side), two-story main block with a two-story projecting rear wing and one-story shed, all on elevated basement.
 2. Foundations: Rubble masonry, finished on the exterior with coursed cement plaster, painted gray.
 3. Wall construction: Coursed ashlar of local quarry-faced limestone, buff in color and weathered dark gray in spots; corners of the main block are finished with large cut limestone quoins; a slightly projecting base course extends around the main block at the first-floor line (approximately 3 feet above grade), and a belt course extends around main block at second-floor sill line.

4. Structural system, framing: Traditional masonry bearing walls with timber floor and roof framing.
5. Porches: One-story, covered and elevated porch (modern) extends across the east (front) elevation - four bays wide and one bay deep; circular wood columns, slightly tapered, rest on square stone piers. Wooden handrail and balusters enclose the porch, and diagonal lattice panels enclose the crawl space beneath the porch. Eight concrete steps with a landing at mid-point provide access from the sidewalk. The roof has a simple entablature with projecting cornice and denticulated frieze. The fabric is badly in need of paint and the moldings and column capitals have badly deteriorated.
6. Chimneys: Three chimneys in the main block - two on the north elevation and one on the south elevation. One chimney at the west end of the two-story rear wing, and one at the west end of the one-story shed. All are built of brick and covered with cement plaster.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main doorway on the north side of the east (front) elevation has a recessed door (replacement) flanked by pilaster trim, side panels, and side lights with three-part fixed transom above; it has cut stone sill and flush limestone lintel. A secondary entrance on the south elevation at the center of the two-story rear wing has recessed frame with limestone lintel and gabled hood.
 - b. Windows: Four-over-four-light, double-hung wooden sash set in recessed wooden frames with large flush cut limestone lintels and projecting sills. All are single windows with the exception of the double windows in the east (front) elevation (two on the second floor and one on the first floor - set in single opening with center mullion).
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Main block - hipped roof with remains of a square belvedere; covered with standing-seam metal. Rear wings - gable roofs with modern bituminous covering.
 - b. Cornices: Main block - heavy bracketed cornice with deep plain frieze and beaded board soffit. Rear wings - simple box cornices, greatly deteriorated.

C. Technical Description of Interior: The interior of the house was not accessible at the time of this report.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: The building faces east on Jackson Street and is surrounded by generally vacant land waiting highway construction and redevelopment.
2. Outbuildings: None.
3. Landscaping, enclosures: Grade level is raised several feet above the sidewalk with a low (approximately one foot) concrete retaining wall. The site contains several trees and shrubs, but is in a generally deteriorated condition.

Prepared by John D. Milner, Architect
National Park Service
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